

COMMENTARY

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT FAGIN?

The Jew-Villain in Western Tradition

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“SINCE the Diaspora, and the scattering of the Jews amongst peoples holding the Christian Faith,” T. S. Eliot writes in an incidental footnote in *Towards a Definition of Culture*, “it may have been unfortunate both for these peoples and for the Jews themselves, that the culture-contact between them has had to be within those neutral zones of culture in which religion could be ignored. . . .” “Culture-contact” is a broad concept, and Mr. Eliot is doubtless thinking of all post-exilic relations between Christians and Jews, from the mutually falsifying intercourse of the marketplace, through

the popular theater, to the worlds of scholarship and high art. The conditions of this contact may seem to a pious man like Mr. Eliot “unfortunate,” but without secularization on both sides, without the common pretense that there is a non-religious culture, there would have been no contact at all. For better or worse, there would have been no possibility of achieving that rich alienated art we think of as particularly our own—and Mr. Eliot’s: bounded on one side by Joyce and John Dewey, D. H. Lawrence and Picasso; and on the other by Freud and Marx, Kafka and Chagall; and straddled by hybrids like Proust.

For the Jew who feels himself to be a full participant in Western culture, it comes always as a new shock to recognize that this culture continues to harbor a mythical image of him that is both insulting and dangerous. But the problem of what to do about it faces him with a grievous dilemma, most recently posed again by the controversy around the movie version of *Oliver Twist* with its obnoxious Fagin. Picket Dickens and T. S. Eliot, excommunicate Chaucer, censor Shakespeare? LESLIE A. FIEDLER offers here his personal approach to this complex problem. He is assistant professor in English and humanities at Montana State University. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1917, he received his BA from New York University and his MA and PhD from the University of Wisconsin. He has contributed criticism, stories, and poetry to *Poetry*, *New Leader*, *Partisan Review*, and *COMMENTARY*.

It was not until the time of the Enlightenment that the dream of a “human” culture, available to Jew and Gentile alike, could even be proposed. With the explicit understanding that darkness and superstition (that is to say, the orthodox Jewish and Christian faiths) were to be disowned, the Jewish intellectual emerged from the ghetto to stand beside his Gentile brother, to accept European culture and to modify it. Crying in unison “*Écrasez l’infâme!*” Deist ex-Christian and rationalist ex-Jew embraced over the vision of the Cabalist and Talmudist undone, the Monk and Inquisitor overthrown by universal reason. Sometimes, for the sake of fraternity, the Jew felt obliged to go through the motions of baptism. A

mere formality—instead of staying away from *shul* on Saturday, the old joke runs, he would fail to go to church on Sunday; a small price for admission into Western culture!

AFTER some two hundred years, we seem to have fulfilled the dream of the Enlightenment. The key names of recent European culture are almost as likely as not to be Jewish names; in politics, in literature, in painting, everywhere we have arrived; there is even one discipline, perhaps the most influential of our day, called by its enemies "the Jewish Science." But though we speak with a score of tongues, we are still—"we"! There is still a "they" to define us; and when a Hitler arises, it is easy to spot "our" artists, to excise them by decree from a national culture—even those supplied with the passport of a baptismal certificate. Religion has unexpectedly refused to wither away; St. Paul and the Cabala are re-read, redeemed. A neo-Christian revival draws off in one direction; a neo-Hasidic awakening tugs in another. The reign of the Goddess of Reason was short.

The dream of a pan-human culture remains a dream, one dreamed long ago and harder each day to remember. We are not even sure that, after all, it may not have been a nightmare. Indeed, M. Sartre tells us that we Jews cling to the liberal dream of a single humanity only "inauthentically," as bad Jews trying to escape our meaning and freedom. For quite different reasons, Martin Buber agrees with him; and a score of voices cry "Amen!"—not only to be fashionable, but in real perplexity and need.

There is everywhere the sense of a crisis in our liaison with the West. Mr. Eliot begins to question the "excessive tolerance" which permitted the experiment in the first place; and he warns us that in his ideal Christian commonwealth no large number of "free-thinking" Jews will be allowed. But we were invited in, we remember, precisely on the terms of being "free-thinkers"; we sang the "Marseillaise" as loud as any of them; and we were assured that the Christian

myth which excluded us was dying, fading to the status of an old wives' tale. Without warning they've changed the rules on us!

We remind Mr. Eliot (most lately David Daiches has been doing it, gently enough) that it was the "free-thinking Jews" who printed him, touted him, loved him in his *Waste Land* days before the official recognition of Nobel committees and state awards; who helped develop the climate of sensibility in which his work flourished. The more philistine among us are driven to cry hysterically, "Boycott the anti-Semite! Don't read the reactionary swine!" But the Jewish intellectual of my generation cannot disown him without disowning an integral part of himself. He has been a profounder influence on a good many of us than the Baal Shem Tov or the author of Job. We are not yet willing to resign from Western culture; and, speaking English, we cannot afford to abjure the *miglior fabbro* of our tongue in the 20th century, the voice which has made in our own rhythm and idiom elegant patterns of our arid despair and quiet oases of hope.

MADE sensitive by Hitler and the collapse of the universalist dream, we re-examine our literary heritage as Jewish writers and readers of English—and we wince! Looking again at Lawrence or Pound, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Marlowe, Pope, Wordsworth, Scott or Dickens, T. S. Eliot, Charles Williams or Graham Greene, everywhere we come upon a myth of the Jew, central to our whole culture, before which as Jews we are embarrassed, dumb. Assured we are legitimate heirs, we enter into our supposed inheritance, only to find we are specifically excluded.

What is the name of the excluding image, half-comic, half-hideous, with red wig and grotesque false nose, who meets us, bloody knife in hand, to call us *chaver*, fellow-Jew? Shylock, Fagin, Isaac, Barrabas, Ahasuerus, Cartaphilus, Colleoni—his momentary labels do not matter; he is the Usurer, the Jew with the Knife, the Jew as Beast. A compulsive image, he haunts the English imagination; a creature of fear and guilt, he exists before

and beneath written literature, an archetype inhabiting the collective unconscious of the English-speaking peoples. Like most of the archetypal figures of our culture, he has been most absolutely realized by Shakespeare, but he is present everywhere in our art. If we come to our literature disregarding his existence, or taking each of his appearances as accidental, disconnected, we will be the more deceived; and will end picketing this moving-picture theater, cutting out that page, boycotting this novel, deprecating that author; or else learn endlessly to encounter the manifold faces of the myth, pretending to be unaware, while the heart leaps with bitterness and terror. Let us at least know clearly that, if we want to call the culture in which we live our own, we will have to come to terms with a believed-in monster, a symbol of darkness whose name we share. The simple knowledge is not enough, but it is the only way to begin.

The real start of the myth of the Jew with the Knife in English literature goes back to the tale, already hundreds of years old, which Chaucer puts into the mouth of his Prioress, a character faintly ridiculous, but lovable and obviously intended to be esteemed. It is a charmingly told tale about a little boy who so irked the Jews by singing the praises of the Virgin, that their community hired a murderer, who cut the child's throat (another version has his heart and tongue cut out) and tossed him into a jakes "wher as the Iewes purgen her entraile." Needless to say, the crime is revealed by a miracle and the Jews cruelly punished; but the important point is that the crime at the heart of the story is one of mutilation with a knife—and that in the early part of the poem, the conventional identification of the Jews with usury is pointedly made. The pattern is already set.

It was the report of an atrocity (the alleged crucifixion of Hugh of Lincoln) which probably moved Chaucer to set down the "Prioress's Tale"; three hundred and fifty years later, another outburst of lynch hysteria over the case of Lopez, court physician to Queen Elizabeth, and a Jew, created the audience

demand to which Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, Gosson's lost play *The Jew*, and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* all responded. The concept of the Machiavel, the stock Elizabethan villain who elevated a kind of onanistic malevolence into a grand passion, lay ready to hand, and was combined with the more primitive notion of the Slasher who thought God's Mother a whore.

Marlowe's *Jew* is known now to a limited audience only, and Gosson's is no more than a casual reference in a forgotten diary; but Shylock is familiar, at least as a name and vague terror, to almost everyone. Shakespeare's Jew has become pre-eminently a usurer, crafty and merciless, but something more, a representative of the tribal fury of Jewry that will not admit its maltreatment is merited. He loves only one thing more than gold: the sweet savor of vengeance. In the old story of the bond and the pound of flesh, Shakespeare hit upon a fable of extraordinary aptness. It is at once a gross but not pointless caricature of the legalism of the Talmudic mind, and a parable, from the Christian point of view, of the Jews' stubborn invocation of that greater Covenant whose literal meaning seems to be their salvation, the Gentiles' exclusion, but in the end proves to mean just the opposite. It preserves, too, the essential image of the bared blade—and makes clear at just what it is aimed.

WHAT, then, is the threat the Christian uneasily dreams? Why is the mythic weapon of the Jew a knife? Antonio is asked to strip; a pound of flesh is to be cut, the original terms stipulated, from anywhere on his body; there is the understanding that such an excision will prevent the consummation of a marriage; in the background, we are aware of the extended meaning of the Bond, the Covenant. It is, of course, *circumcision* with which the boy feels himself menaced, a vicious circumcision that blurs in his guilt-ridden, scared mind into castration. In Shakespeare's actual text, the place from which the flesh is to be cut is finally an area "nearest to the heart," but is not this

an obvious displacement, like Chaucer's throat or the tongue and heart of the analogues?

The sense of a threat greater than that explicitly stated, a threat to sexuality, is really there, in the play; and, it seems to me, even the standard atrocity attributed to the Jew, the ritual murder of a child, is a rationalization of that original nightmare of the circumcisor, ritual blade in hand. The Jew as slasher never dies from the imagination; his latest avatar (via the Fagin of Dickens) is Colleoni, the gangster with the razor blade in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*; while the other aspect of Shylock, the Jew as usurer, flourishes in many places in that author's highly mythic works: for instance, the financier in *This Gun for Hire*, or Myatt in *Orient Express*, who struggles briefly against his fate, but whom we see, at last, wondering as he betrays all human feeling and decency "whether Mr. Stein had the contract in his pocket."

For Ezra Pound, of course, Shylock has become a master image of his paranoia, hallucinatory, compulsive, the usurer as enemy of the world, the Yid as the essential evil of all social life. The memory of Shylock's scriptural instance, Jacob and the flocks of Laban, the accent of the Jew, the shadow of his monstrous nose afflict him, haunt his verse. In the earlier poetry of Eliot the same mythic presence is there, in "Gerontion," for instance, as the illegitimate dispossessor of the *goy* fallen on evil days. Even in D. H. Lawrence, he appears fitfully, "Mr. Nosey Hebrew," like Ben Franklin an enemy of love.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare has added a counter-theme, another level of significance to complicate the fable: the Jew's stolen daughter. Jessica has had many descendants—among them, Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, Ruth in Melville's *Clarel*—for she is as truly mythic as her father. A trivial, sensual, faithless girl regarded out of the legend, in its context she becomes a symbolic figure of rich meaning. The Christian world has never been quite able to forget that the mother of its redeemer was a Jewess; and

the Jessica-Shylock relationship provides a fictional pattern in which the Christian mind can realize its view of the "good" Jewish qualities: a feminine warmth and responsiveness and a capacity of devotion, enthralled to avarice and cold pharisaism.

Since the Virgin is a daughter of Israel, the Christian world vaguely feels Israel as a symbolic father-in-law, a cruel and unwilling parent to whom disobedience is a virtue. In this extension of the myth the castrator becomes fused with a kind of unsavory *pater imago*, the wicked father, from whom one can steal his treasure and his beloved without a qualm. But the stolen Jessica is the daughter of a widower, image and substitute for a dead wife, as well as a symbol of the divine mother—and she brings into the situation bizarre hints of an Oedipus conflict. To be sure, Shakespeare splits the complex, associating the castration theme with Antonio, and the rape of the old man's beloved with Lorenzo. It is a comedy after all, and the darker implications must be muted, concealed—to leave them laughing in the pit.

THE conclusion of the mythic pattern must be the humiliation and downfall of the Jew (his forcible conversion in comedy, his death by torture in tragedy); and to keep the contradiction between his vindictive end and the Christian obligation to mercy from becoming too blatant, the myth habitually involves a de-humanization of the Jew, his portrayal as more beast than man. Even in Chaucer, there is some animal imagery, the Snake entering the hearts of the Jews, those hearts compared to nests of wasps. In Shakespeare, however, the method is carried much further; by the end of the play, Shylock is not merely compared to but is a dog, a wolf. (In one of Shakespeare's sources the main image is, ironically enough, that of a hog, and the sow is used to represent the Jew in anti-Semitic caricatures of many countries down through Hitler's day.)

O be thou damned, inexcusable dogge. . . .
Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith;
To hold the opinion with Pythagoras,

*That souls of Animals infuse themselves
Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
Governed a Wolfe. . . .
And whil'st thou layest in thy unhallowed
dam
Infused itself in thee. . . .*

In Pope's *Moral Essays* the toad, more horrible for not being specifically named, is substituted for the dog, which had risen in social esteem between Shakespeare's time and that age of lap-dogs.

*And every child hates Shylock, though his
soul
Still sits at squat, and peers not from its hole.*

The suggestion is picked up and re-echoed in T. S. Eliot's

*My house is a decayed house,
And the jew squats on the window sill, the
owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp. . . .*

Indeed, it is Eliot's typical method, and almost compulsive approach, to mention the Jew always in a low animal context, toad, rat, or the unnamed vulturine creature of "Sweeney Among the Nightingales."

*The rats are underneath the piles.
The jew is underneath the lot. . . .*

*Rachel née Rabinovich
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws. . . .*

There is really no overt, no active anti-Semitism in this; Mr. Eliot is shocked when the charge is made against him, raises a surprised and gentle demurrer. It is true, after all, that consciously he opposes anti-Semitism as a heresy, proposes neither the gas chamber nor the pogrom; but on the unconscious level, the Jew is to him an object of horror, a symbol of illegitimate dispossession, of bestiality. Similarly, Graham Greene, who writes publicly against the persecution of the Jews, peoples his works with Jews unfailingly sinister: creatures lost to the spirit,

devoted only to things; betrayed, despite their smiles and false Anglo-Saxon names, by the undeniable nose of Shylock.

It is inevitable that Shylock take on new life and vigor in any literature which turns back to the traditional sources of myth, whether the impulse is neo-Christian as in the cases of Eliot and Greene, or pagan and aesthetic as in the case of Pound. In most respectable modern literature, the myth is no longer associated with the lynch spirit out of which Chaucer's Jew and Shakespeare's arose; it reflects an irrepressible vestigial shudder rather than the lust for a pogrom. There is an apt passage in Hazlitt's essay "On the Pleasure of Hating": "A child, a woman, a clown, or a moralist a century ago, would have crushed the little reptile to death: my philosophy has got beyond that. I bear the creature no ill will, but still I hate the very sight of it. The spirit of malevolence survives the practical exertion of it. We learn to curb our will and keep our covert actions within the bounds of humanity, long before we can subdue our sentiments and imaginations to the same mild tone. We give up the external demonstration, the *brute* violence, but cannot part with the essence or principle of hostility. We do not tread upon the poor animal in question (that seems barbarous and pitiful!) but we regard it with a sort of mystic horror and superstitious loathing. It will ask another hundred years of fine writing and hard thinking to cure us of the prejudice, and make us feel toward this ill-omened tribe with something of 'the milk of human kindness,' instead of their own shyness of venom."

These lines were written of—*spiders*! It is distressing to think that with scarcely a change they can be read as referring to Jews; though the Jews, alas, are thinking spiders, vermin that walk like men. Before the Enlightenment, our "ill-omened tribe" lived in a world as remote from the world of Western culture as any insect society. If we were not stepped on, we did not suffer; but now we are moved by the dimmest internal shudder, as it is recorded in art. We print it, buy it, read it—and are hurt by it. Whatever a hun-

dred years of "fine writing and hard thinking" has done for the spider, it has brought us—Hitler.

The principle of hostility that seemed to Hazlitt forever severed from brute violence seems more ambiguous to us in the light of Dachau. Where do we, then, as reasoning reptiles, go from here? What response can we make to a culture in which so terrible and perilous a myth of ourselves is inextricably involved?

WE COULD withdraw from the whole problem, pull back into some spiritual ghetto, where only sticks and stones might break our bones. . . . Perhaps it has been a mistake, and it is time after two hundred years to admit that Western culture is basically hostile to us as Jews. There are several spiritual ghettos for sale at a reasonable price: the Hebrew pastoralism of modern Israel; the return via Hasidism or Talmudism to a closed Orthodox community; even the possibility of accepting Eastern European totalitarianism as a *pis aller*. After all, the rather desperate apology goes, at least there is no anti-Semitism there! Not a few Jews these days, otherwise quite unsympathetic to Stalinism, turn in despair to an avowedly anti-Christian culture, with a sense that Hitler was what our Western world had been all the time meaning. For those of us who choose to remain where we are such solutions are palpably impossible: and for any of us, in the Galut or in Israel, there is simply too much to lose, values which have become as essential to us as air, areas of experience without which our lives would seem hopelessly meager. Besides, we have given too many hostages to the West; pulling out, we would have to leave behind our Montaignes and Spinozas, our Prousts and Freuds, our Einsteins and Kafkas, our Blochs and Soutines.

Another strategy is simply to accept the validity of the myth, and dissociate ourselves from it. This is a more complex matter than mere assimilation, although it sometimes begins with that process. Karl Marx and Heine are two classic examples of that strategy in action: they accepted the Shylock

symbol as true, and in their mouths "Jew!" was an epithet to be flung in anger and derision at those with whom they disagreed; it had nothing to do with them, but belonged to a dark and malevolent world they were bent on destroying. Even they, however, were able to stay inside such a solution only intermittently; and for us all hope of such an easy out is lost. For, since Houston Chamberlain, "Jew" has not meant an adherent to a particular faith, or a follower of a certain way of life, but anyone connected by blood, however remotely, to such adherents or followers.

So racism has stymied the strategy of escape by dissociation; although a variant of it flourishes in certain Zionist quarters, where Shylock is accepted as a symbol of the corruption of the Jew in Exile, the black disease from which we are to be cured by contact with the Land, the nightmare from which we shall be awakened by the guns of the Haganah. This bias, setting Hebrew against Jew and splitting our people, can be no final solution.

A third approach is what might be called kidnapping the myth, that is, reinterpreting it, reading into it, as it is fixed in traditional story, new, more sympathetic meanings. During the Romantic period, precisely such an appropriation was successfully made of the Wandering-Jew-Magus (a late-comer in English literature and not nearly so important as the Shylock *imago*). The figure of Cartaphilus or Ahasuerus, who was told by Jesus to tarry until his second coming for having struck him on the road to Calvary, had been originally accepted as a symbol of the eternal exile, the unremitting exclusion of the stiff-necked Jew; and an additional aura of horror became attached to the figure when it was identified with the concept of the Jew as Black Magician. By the time of Shelley, however, Ahasuerus had been transformed into an archetype of the Rebel, the Promethean or Byronic villain-hero with burning eyes, who had mutinied against God himself for the sake of mankind.

It was only a momentary victory. The collapse of the vogue of the Satanic hero has

brought the wheel full circle; Cartaphilus and Manfred alike seem to us these days childish in their viciousness; and in Charles Williams' *All Hallows Eve*, the Wandering Jew has returned in all his old terror, as Simon the Clerk, the dark magician and the instrument of annihilation.

THERE has always been the feeling that *The Merchant of Venice* is the key to the degraded picture of the Jew. If only this could be redeemed! It has for nearly a hundred years been strategically misinterpreted, argued with; quite recently the whole story has even been rewritten from the Jewish point of view. But the main attack has been launched on the stage. Since the mid-19th century a tradition of acting Shylock as a tragic and suffering victim has grown up to replace the original concept of the burlesqued villain, the "oi! oi! oi!" interpretation which rolled them in the aisles at the Globe.

Heine writes in 1856 of having seen such a modernizing performance at Drury Lane, at which a "pale, fair Briton" was moved to weep and cry out, "The poor man is wronged!"; but there is an underlying menace in the play which cannot be sentimentalized out of existence. Writing at almost the very same time, another German critic returns from a performance full of anti-Semitic fire to jot down the terrible words of Luther, which he felt confirmed by Shylock: "Know, then, dear Christian, that, next to the Devil, thou canst have no bitterer, fiercer foe than a genuine Jew, one who is Jew in earnest. The true counsel I give thee, is that fire be put to their synagogues, and that, over what will not burn up, the earth be heaped and piled, so that no stone or trace of them be seen for evermore."

The appropriation of the myth is a chancy thing at best, depending upon a subjective emphasis, against which the traditional fable forever contends. Wherever *The Merchant of Venice* is played, there is a risk of the old abysmal terror stirring to life in the beholder, for that terror is more ancient than any "humane" interpretation, older than the play that is merely one of its outward forms.

Most recently there has been an attempt from many Jewish quarters to *expurgate* Western culture of whatever smacks of anti-Semitism, to introduce what has been called a censorship of sensitivity: pickets have marched before a movie version of *Oliver Twist*; the "Prioress's Tale" has been left out of a new modern-English Chaucer; proposals have been made to take *Ivanhoe* and *The Merchant of Venice* from required reading lists in the schools; Eliot and Pound have been blasted in the Jewish press. There is something disturbing in all this, an impulse on the one hand extraordinarily naive, and on the other, hysterical to the point of being dangerous.

The naivety lies in a failure to realize how deep and essential is the complex at which we take random blows here and there. Perhaps it is a defensive naivety, willingly clung to; we hesitate to face the total problem, *want* to believe we are dealing with a matter whose solution will require no more than the excision of a few pages from a handful of books.

Let us examine, for a moment, the problem of Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale," now excluded from one translation of the *Canterbury Tales*. Will we ask as a next step its expurgation from *all* renderings in modern English? What, then, about the original Middle English text, not so difficult to read after all? After we have made that kosher, we shall just have begun: there will have to be a page torn from every edition of the complete works of Wordsworth, for that poet published in 1820 his own verse translation of Chaucer's story; Percy's *Reliques* will have to be examined and the ballad of Hugh of Lincoln removed; all accounts in Latin and English of the score of children canonized after alleged mutilation and murder by Jews will have to be burned. And what will have been accomplished even at that point beyond removing the outward and visible manifestations of the dream-shape that has haunted the West for two thousand years: the Jew with the Knife, circumcisor, castrator, ritual murderer? The myth may eventually die, but it cannot be killed.

MEANWHILE, we will have unleashed in our vain attempt a perilous hysteria that will be hard to keep in reasonable bounds, and which will be met by counter-hysterias. In view of history, the Jew as censor, invoking inquisition and the index on his own behalf against the printed word, cannot help but seem an absurdity, even to himself. The burning of books is a terrible recourse, to which we should not turn except in final desperation. (I do not contend, as has John Haynes Holmes in a recent article, that there is nothing extraordinary in our situation except our sensitivity; that the mythic Jew is no different in kind from the stage Irishman, the stingy Scotsman, the lecherous Parisian. It is impossible to forget that men have died of our myth.)

It is ridiculous to attempt to censor a whole culture, even of what we know is a palpable and terrible evil. As we permit to art, for the sake of values real though difficult to define, blasphemy, scurrility, the advocacy of suicide and adultery, the glorification of masochism and narcissism, so we must permit it—anti-Semitism. I would myself be unwilling to give up, even in a self-imposed boycott, *The Merchant of Venice* or the poems of Ezra Pound because they contain evil doctrine; beside the corruption, there is beauty and a degree of true vision that we cannot afford to sacrifice.

We must translate for ourselves, as we read, passionate avarice, nihilism, and the desire to mutilate, into terms more universal than the mythic bestial Jew; the archetypal image that realizes these black qualities is, in one sense, no lie; we know such impulses exist, even in us, though not of course as we are Jews, but as we are men. Yet we will not be able to keep from wincing at the specific identification of moral darkness with our name until the Gentile has learned to wince at having made the identification in the first

place. We cannot come to that realization for him; the Gentile must learn for himself that Shylock is the creature of *his* fantasy and fear; *his* stratagem to transfer the evil that haunts us all on to an alien, an Other. Already there are signs in some quarters of such a realization; but a myth dies slowly at best—and in a world of increasing terror is artificially revived. It will not be tomorrow that we will be able to watch without a qualm the curtain go up on *The Merchant of Venice*. If the Christian world seems to move in this regard at a glacial rate, let us realize the terrible burden of guilt that awaits it upon the final recognition; and we can perhaps find in ourselves a kind of pity to balance our impatience and dismay.

In the meanwhile, we can begin to build rival myths of our meaning for the Western world, other images of the Jew to dispossess the ancient images of terror. Several, of varying dignity and depth, are already in existence: the happy Hebrew peasant of the new Israel; the alienated Jew as artist (Kafka's K.) or dilettante (Proust's Swann) or citizen (Joyce's Bloom); the sensitive young victim of the recent crop of American war novels; the ambiguous figure of Saul Bellow's novel, both victim and oppressor. In all the countries of the West, and pre-eminently in America, we have been passing in the last three or four generations from the periphery to the center of culture; more and more, the myths of the Jew will be the handiwork of Jews or of Gentiles whose sensibilities have been profoundly conditioned by ours.

Indeed, in this apocalyptic period of atomization and uprooting, of a catholic terror and a universal alienation, the image of the Jew tends to become the image of everyone; and we are perhaps approaching the day when the Jew will come to seem the central symbol, the essential myth of the whole Western world.